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## **Humpback whale caught in netting off the coast**

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A humpback whale has become entangled in a lobster pot and netting south of the Rockaways, the Coast Guard announced, and a special team is being assembled to cut it loose on Thursday.

The Coast Guard learned of the trapped animal Wednesday around 12:30 p.m. and set up a 500-yard safety zone around the whale, which was eight miles east of Sandy Hook, N. J., and near active shipping lanes. The Coast Guard Cutter Penobscot Bay and a vessel from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration were on the scene to protect the animal.

The whale -- reportedly visible on the surface and breathing, according to the Coast Guard -- was described as a juvenile humpback, about 25 to 30 feet long, according to Jamison Smith, the large whale disentanglement coordinator for NOAA. He said a team from the Massachusetts-based Center for Coastal Studies would arrive Thursday to work with NOAA staff to free the whale.

Smith said that the entanglement was "potentially life-threatening" and that freeing the whale could be "very dangerous both for the animal and for the rescuers," although he did say authorities were optimistic the whale could be rescued. He said an entanglement happens in local waters "once every year or every other year."

It was not known who owned the gear that snared the whale at the base of its tale. Smith said that could be determined Thursday once rescuers got their hands on it.

"We are ensuring the safety of both the animal and boaters," said Lt. j.g. Eric Hanson, Coast Guard Sector New York's command duty officer, in a statement released Wednesday afternoon. "Coast Guard Sector New York is issuing safety marine broadcasts hourly on VHF channel 16 and will be working closely with the NOAA and other agencies to assist."

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